



Maryland Port Administration

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Congressman Cardin Unveils Gamma Ray Scanner at Port of Baltimore

Mobile Detection System Strengthens Security at the Port

BALTIMORE, MD (February 10, 2003) – Rep. Benjamin L. Cardin, along with the U.S. Customs Service and the Maryland Port Administration, unveiled today the latest tool used to combat terrorism and smuggling at U.S. ports. The Vehicle and Cargo Inspection Systems, or VACIS, is a mobile, non-intrusive detection system that can quickly and easily inspect the contents of trucks, containers, cargo and passenger vehicles for explosive devices and contraband.

“Any type of terrorist incident using a container could have a profound effect on this country,” remarked Rep. Cardin, who has worked with Maryland’s maritime community to obtain this inspection tool in order to help alleviate fears of terrorist attacks on the high seas and at busy trading ports. “It is my hope that equipment such as VACIS will serve as a deterrent and provide an added layer of protection to our overall efforts in seaport security.”

Developed as a joint project between the U.S. Customs Service, the Office of National Drug Control Policy and the Department of Defense, VACIS utilizes gamma rays, like x-rays, to produce an image. It is safe, highly reliable and cost-effective. The unit can be driven to an inspection site, deployed and set-up in about 15 minutes. Capable of scanning vehicles up to 125 feet in length in one pass, the mobile VACIS usually scans approximately eight containers per hour. Once the container is scanned, gamma images are viewed on a computer monitor, where operators can compare it to the declared manifest, or the images can be stored in the on-board computer for further review.

“To make critical security improvements – to train personnel, to track cargo, to toughen the supply chain – all this takes great resources,” said Jim White, Executive Director of the Maryland Port Administration. “We know we can’t do this alone. We are working with many able partners – and today we especially recognize the role of Customs and Congressman Ben Cardin in helping us harden our port against any threat.”

With 95 percent of all international trade arriving by ship, port security is a major priority at the nation’s 361 commercial seaports. The Port of Baltimore – which is comprised of five public terminals and many private terminals – is first in the nation in key cargoes and among the top 10 U.S. ports in terms of the dollar value of the goods that pass over its docks.

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In the wake of the September 11th attacks, the maritime community must comply with new security rules mandated by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to prevent a sea borne terrorist attack. To date, the U.S. Customs Service has deployed 107 large-scale non-intrusive inspection (NII) systems to land, air and sea ports on both coasts. Thirteen additional NII systems will be deployed to seaports in calendar year 2003. Baltimore is scheduled to receive a second Mobile VACIS system in May 2003.

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